

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL**Report by Strategic Lead, Housing and Employability****Council Meeting: 24 June 2020**

Subject: West Dunbartonshire Community Foodshare**1. Purpose**

- 1.1** The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the decision by the Council in February to provide a one-off earmarked contingency fund of up to £50,000 that Community Foodshare can draw on up to September 2022.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1** It is recommended that the Council continue to provide access to the contingency funds of up to £50,000 to be drawn down by Community Foodshare as it develops its plans for sustainability.
- 2.2** The Council notes that Community Foodshare has yet to full develop their plans for sustainability. This is a direct result of issues beyond the organisation's control (Covid-19) and the need for the organisation to prioritise actions to address the resulting, immediate, food insecurity issues.

3. Background

- 3.1** The Council noted in February that, due to circumstances beyond their control, Community Foodshare found themselves in an extremely precarious financial situation while facing increasing general demand driven by a number of converging factors. These converging factors included: the negative impact of welfare reform; increased seasonal demand; and additional pressure because of Brexit uncertainty and associated reports of potential food insecurity.
- 3.2** As a result the Council agreed to provide a one-off earmarked contingency fund of up to £50,000 that would be drawn on up to September 2022. This award was contingent on due diligence by Council officers and based on the development and implementation of a plan for sustainability. The earmarked funds would only be utilised if WDCF were unsuccessful in securing sufficient external funding to maintain their service. To date £1,309 has been drawn down from this fund.
- 3.3** In light of the decision Council officers from Working 4U established a planned programme of sessions with the objective of establishing a business plan. The business plan would be used to support the organisation's efforts to secure funding from a range of alternative sources.

3.4 Before the business plan and funding plan could be developed, both the Council and Community Foodshare were affected by the emergence of Covid-19 and the need to direct resources towards addressing its impact. Community Foodshare, along with Food for Thought have played a key role, along with Council staff from Working 4U, in the development of processes and action to address food insecurity for the most vulnerable residents in West Dunbartonshire.

4. Main Issues

4.1 On the 23rd of March the Scottish Government announced its decision to ban public gatherings of more than two people in Scotland in a bid to flatten the curve of Covid-19 spread and protect the NHS. The ban was placed on gatherings in public places and subsequently extended to certain businesses, venues and work-places. People were also required to stay at home, except for very limited purposes.

4.2 It was recognised that some people would be particularly vulnerable to coronavirus infection because of underlying health conditions and they were advised to take particular care to minimise contact with others outside their household. In addition, there's a further group of people who were also defined, on medical grounds, as clinically extremely vulnerable to coronavirus. They were also advised to adopt shielding measures to keep themselves safe by staying at home and avoiding all contact with others, except for essential medical treatment or support.

4.3 Local authorities were expected to proactively reach out to shielding people, as well as disadvantaged groups in their areas and provide support that would enable them to socially isolate. As a result, West Dunbartonshire Council established the 'Crisis Support Service' and Humanitarian Hubs to achieve this aim. Our aim was to identify and assist those identified as vulnerable on medical grounds as well as those likely to be affected because of family circumstances. For example, those affected by child poverty; families with care experience; and households with members who were 65+ years of age.

4.4 In addition, and in response to the emerging levels of concern about food supplies in disadvantaged and shielded households, the 'food insecurity' group was established by the Crisis Support Team to meet local needs.

4.5 The aim of the group was to ensure those most vulnerable to the effect of coronavirus would not exhaust their food supplies and, as a result, find themselves less able to comply with the national guidelines on social isolation by leaving their homes. The food insecurity group consists of Council Officers (W4U) and representatives from the two established foodbanks in West Dunbartonshire: 'Community Foodshare' and 'Food for Thought'.

4.6 Drawing on the expertise, networks, volunteers and supply chains developed by the foodbanks over a number of years we sought to utilise the

'foodinsecurity' funds to provide residents with emergency food supplies on demand.

- 4.7** Through the prudent use of the fund, the local foodbanks have worked directly with the Crisis Support Team and with investment of £35,000 have:
- Contributed to an effective referral service;
 - Increased their provision;
 - Extended the range of people supported to include those social isolating and disadvantaged as a result of Covid-19;
 - Developed their services (pre-prepared meals, 'able to pay service');
 - Consolidated their staff and volunteer resources to maintain services; and
 - Complemented the food provided by the Scottish Government through their carebox service for the most vulnerable.
- 4.8** The majority of the food insecurity funds to address community-based uncertainty have been used to purchase additional food for the most vulnerable in our communities. As a result an additional 557 families, beyond the number the foodbanks would have supported, have received emergency food supplies each receiving a minimum of 4 weeks supply of food.
- 4.9** The input of the two local foodbanks has been an invaluable component of West Dunbartonshire's Covid-19 Crisis response and has ensured the response to food insecurity has been concerted, efficient, focussed on those most in need and effective in meeting their needs. Without this input the quality of support in West Dunbartonshire would have been compromised.
- 4.10** However, the demands placed on the respective organisations addressing food insecurity have been such that the work to develop and implement Community Foodshare's plan for sustainability has been held in abeyance.

5. People Implications

- 5.1** There are no direct people implications for the Council.

6. Financial and Procurement Implications

- 6.1** The precarious financial situation that Community Foodshare found itself in has, through the use of food insecurity funding, been temporarily overcome.
- 6.2** However, the need for access to contingency funding to support the organisation towards sustainability remains and is likely to intensify as the funds to address food insecurity that have been made available in the short term diminish. The current funds from that source are available until the end of June 2020. Details about the availability of further food insecurity funding to address community-based challenges have yet to emerge.

6.3 As such, plans are to monitor the level and availability of resources to Community Foodshare as the Covid-19 foodinsecurity activity unfolds. This will include the continued use of food insecurity resources to purchase food, and where appropriate, maintain staff resources within both food banks. This will ensure that a critical constituent of West Dunbartonshire's response to Covid-19 remains intact.

6.4 The contingent fund of £50,000 made available to Community Foodshare in February should remain available for use by the organisation. This will allow some medium-term stability and allow the organisation to continue with its focus on addressing food insecurity during the current Covid-19 crisis.

7. Risk Analysis

7.1 Community Foodshare, along with Food for Thought, have played a critically important role in the design, development and delivery of a key component of West Dunbartonshire's response to Covid-19. Without the support of these organisations our response to foodinsecurity will be compromised.

7.2 Furthermore, without the input of these organisations' expertise, networks and resources, West Dunbartonshire Council would have to directly establish the infrastructure to address food insecurity. This would include the need to establish storage premises, develop the logistics to receive, sort and distribute food to hundreds of residents; and manage and develop the staff and volunteer resources to maintain the service.

7.3 As such the risks are:

- The food insecurity response emerging as a result of Covid-19 would be less effective and would draw Council staff away from other interventions to carry out foodinsecurity delivery activity;
- The food insecurity response would have taken longer to develop;
- The food insecurity response would be less focussed on those most in need;
- The food insecurity response would be more expensive.

7.4 These risks are mitigated by providing Community Foodshare with the continued safety net of a contingency fund to support its post Covid-19 sustainability plans.

8. Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA)

8.1 The focus of the support provided through the food insecurity response include those with underlying health conditions that make them more vulnerable to the negative elements of Covid-19; families targeted within the child poverty legislation and households with elderly members. As such the intervention, supported by the community-based foodbanks is focussed on those likely to be affected by equalities issues.

9. Consultation

- 9.1 The opportunity for full consultation has not been available since the emergence of covid-19 and actions to flatten the curve, protect the NHS and assist the most vulnerable.

10. Strategic Assessment

- 10.1 At its meeting on 25 October 2017, the Council agreed to five main strategic priorities for 2017 – 2022. These include the delivery of efficient and effective frontline services that improve the everyday lives of residents.
- 10.2 The support and response to the crisis stimulated by the emergence of Covid-19 provided by Community Foodshare has assisted the Council to deliver an effective frontline service that has contributed to national objectives for addressing Covid-19 and assisting the NHS to cope with the emerging demands placed upon its services. As important, if not more so in the local context, as a result of this input more vulnerable families and households than would have been the case otherwise have been supported. They have been supported more quickly and have received supplementary provisions that wouldn't have been available otherwise. As a result they have been better placed to deal with some of the effects of covid-19 on their households.

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Appendices: There are no appendices.

Background Papers: There are no additional papers.

Wards Affected: The issue affects all council Wards.

